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Graham, Dougal

The witty & entertaining ... George Buchanan

Newcastle-on-Tyne

[1850?]

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THE

WITTY & ENTERTAINING EXPLOITS

OF

George Buchanan,

COMMONLY CALLED

THE KING'S FOOL.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE:
JOHN ROSS, PRINTER, AND PUBLISHER.
ROYAL ARCADE.

JOHN
GRISWOLD WHITE
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GEORGE BUCHANAN.

SIR GEORGE BUCHANAN was a Scotchman born, and, though of mean parentage, made great progress in learning. As for his understanding and ready wit, he excelled all men then alive in that age that ever proposed questions to him. He was servant or teacher to king James VI., as his private councellor, but publicly he acted as fool.

It happened one day that a young lairy nobleman went into the king's garden, to pull a flower for a young lady he fancied. George followed at a distance; so when the young man found a flower to his pleasure, he would not pull it, but to find it again without further searching, he covered it with his hat, and went away to his sweetheart. No sooner was he gone, than up goes George, lifts the hat, pulls the flower, then eases himself on the spot, and covers it with the hat again, and away he

goes. Soon after the young gentleman returned, leading his sweetheart, to pull the flower below the hat; but as soon as he lifted the hat, and saw what was below it, he looked like a fool; and the lady flying in a passion, set of, and would never countenance him any more. The young gentleman being sadly vexed at this affront given him by George. sent him a challenge to fight him, appointing day and place where they were to meet. Being to fight on horseback, George got an old stiff horse, and for harnessing covers him about with blown bladders, with small stones in each, without either sword or spear; away to the field he goes, where the duel was appointed. So when George saw his enemy coming against him all in glittering armour, armed with sword and spear, he made up to him with all the speed his horse would carry him; when the small stones made such a rattling noise, that the gentleman's fine gelding would not stand the battle, but ran away and threw his master to the ground, which caused all the spectators to laugh and say, "the gentleman was more fool than George." The gentleman being still more enraged at this affront, he would fight with George on foot; but his friends persuaded him that is would be no honor to fight and kill the king's fool, and far less to be killed by the fool; so they were advised both to agree. But the gentleman would try another exploit with George, for to have it said he was the cleverest man, viz:—to hold him a jumping bout publicly, the next day thereafter. With all my heart

says George, and we will end in and where we began; they not knowing his meaning in this. The place and hour being set where they were to meet next morning, George, in the night-time caused a deep pit to be made, and the earth of it carried away; and then filled it up with dung from a privy, and covered it over with green turf, that it might not be known from the other ground. So, according to promise, they met in the morning at the appointed time. Now George being the oldest man and by them counted the greatest fool, the young spark permitted him to jump first; which he according to order did, and jumped within a foot of where the ground was falcified. The young man seeing this made his performance with great airs, and all his might so that he jumped a foot over George, and up to his oxters in clean dung; whereat the whole multitude cried out with loud huzzas and laughter. Now, says George, I told you we would end in and about where we began and that is in clean dirt.

On a time after this, the king and his court were going into the country, and they would have George to ride before them in the fool's dress; whereunto he seemed unwilling but it was the king's pleasure. So George was mounted upon an old horse, with the heels hanging down, and a palmer coat, patched over with pictures of various kinds. George rode before them in this posture, which caused great laughter and diversion, until they came to an inn, where they alighted to dine; and in the time they were at dinner George went

into the stables and with a knife cut all the horses chaffs, not sore but just so as they might bleed. Now, as soon as dinner was over, and they mounted their horses again, George riding before them as usual, in his palmer coat and old boots, they began to make their game of him: then George turning about suddenly clapped his hands with loud laughter, the king asked him what made him laugh so? Laugh! says George, how can I but laugh when horses cannot hold their tongues! O my sovereign, says he, don't you know your horses have rent their chaffs laughing at my old boots? Then every man looking at his horse's chaffs, they were all in a rage against George. The king caused George to dismount directly, and charged him never to let him see his face on English ground. Now, George knowing that nothing could reconcile the king at this time, he came away to Scotland, and caused to be made a pair of great boots, and put a quantity of Scotch earth into them, and away he goes to London, to see the king once more. He hearing the king and his court had to pass through a country village, George places himself in old anwindow, and set up his bare a—e to the king and his court as they passed. The King being greatly amazed to see such an unusual notice done to him, was curious to know the performer, so he called unto him desiring him to come down, and finding it to be George, sir, says the King, did I not charge you never to let me see your face again. True, my sovereign, says George,

for which cause I let you see my a—se. But, says the king, you were never to come on English ground again. Neither I did, says George, pulling off his boots before the king, —behold my sovereign, it is all Scotch earth I stand upon. The king and his court being greatly diverted with his merry joke, George was admitted to the king's favor.

About this time the French king, in order to pick a quarrel with the court of Britain, sent a letter to the king desiring it to be read before the parliament; and the writing was as follows: "Will I come? will I come? will I come?" This letter being read before the king and his courtiers, they all concluded that the French designed to invade England; wherefore they ordered an answer to be wrote, upbraiding him with a breach of peace, and putting him in mind of the last treaty. The answer being read over before the king and his nobles, they all agreed that it should be sent off. But George, smiling and shaking his head said:—

Many men many minds;
Who knows what he designs?

They then asked George what he thought the French king meant by such a letter. To which he answered, I suppose he wants an invitation to come over and dine with you, and then return in a friendly manner, but you are going to charge him with a breach of peace, before he has given any signal of offence. His letter is indeed dark and mystical; but send him an answer according to his question. Now, George being ordered to

write the answer, it was as follows:—"And ye come—and ye come—and ye come." This being sent to the French king, he admired it beyond expression, saying, it was more valiant and daring than he expected. So the enmity he intended was extinguished, and turned into love.

It happened once that a malignant party in Scotland sent up a great sportsman to the king and parliament, for seducing of the church: George hearing of his coming went away and met him on the bridge, and the salutation that he gave him was the cutting off of his head and throwing it over the bridge! He then run to the king with all his might, and fell down before him, pleading most heartily for pardon, or without it he was a dead man. The king most seriously asked him what he had done now? to which he answered he had only thrown the Scots bishop's hat over the bridge; which made the king laugh, to hear him ask pardon for such a small fault. But he had no sooner got the pardon sealed by the king, than he said, indeed my sovereign, I threw his hat over the bridge, but his head was in it, Geordy, Geordy, says the king, thou wilt never give over till thou be hanged.

A nobleman in England agreed with the king, how to put a trick upon George, to try his manly courage in sending him to a certain place for a bag of money. On his way home through St. James's Park, they engaged a sturdy fellow to attack him on the way, and take the money from him. The fellow being

armed with sword and pistol, came up briskly and attacked George with these words: you, sir, deliver what money you have or you are a dead man, to which George answered—sir, I have some indeed, but 'tis not my own, and therefore do not like to part with it: nevertheless, being determined as you seem to be, to exchange blows for it, pray do me the favor to fire your pistol through the flap of my coat that the owners may see I have been in danger of my life before I parted with it, which he accordingly did. No sooner had he fired the pistol, than George whips out his hanger from below his coat, and with one stroke cut off the fellows right-hand, wherein he held his sword, and both sword and hand fell to the ground; but George lifted his hand and carried it to the king. No sooner did he come before them, but they asked him, saying, well George, did you see any body to trouble you by the way? None, said he, but one fellow, who was going to take the money from me; but I made him give me his hand he would never do it again. You did? says the fellow's master, yes I did, says George, let work bear witness, throwing down the hand on the table before them all.

George happened one time to be in company with a bishop, and so they began on education, wherein he blanked the bishop so remarkably, that the bishop himself owned he was worsted. Then one of the company addressed George in these words: thou Scot should not have left thy own country. For what reason? says George. Because thou

last carried all the wisdom that is in it hither with thee. No, no, says George, the shepherds in Scotland will discourse with any bishop in London, and exceed them very far in education. The bishop took this as an affront, and several noblemen affirmed it to be as the Scot had said: bets were laid on each side, and three of the bishops were chosen and sent away to Scotland to dispute with the shepherds, accompanied with several others, who were to bear witness of what they should hear pass between them. Now, George knowing which way they went, took another road, and was in Scotland before them. He then made acquaintance with a shephard on the border, whose pasture lay on the road-side where the bishops were to pass; and there he mounted himself in a shephard's dress, and when he saw the bishops appear, he conveyed his flock to the road-side, and fell a chanting a latin ballad. When the bishops came up to George, one of them asked him in French what o'clock it was? to which he answered in Hebrew. It is directly about the time of the day it was yesterday at this time. Another asked him in Greek what countrymen he was? To which he answered in Flemish, if you knew that you would be as wise as myself. A third asked him where he was educated? To which he answered in Gaelic herding my sheep between this and Lochaber? This they desired him to explain in English, which he immediately did. Now, says one of them, we need proceed no further. What, says George, are you butchers? I'll

sell you a few sheep. To this they made no answer: but went away shamefully, saying, they believed the Scots had been through all the nations in the world for their education or the devil had taught them. Now when George had ended his dispute with the bishops he stripped off the shepherd's dress, and up through England goes, with all the haste imaginable, so that he arrived at the place from whence they set out, three days before the judges, and went every day asking if they had come so that he might not be suspected. As soon as they arrived, all that were concerned in the dispute, and many more came crowding to hear what news from the Scotch shepherds, and to know what had been done. No sooner had the three gentlemen declared what had passed between the bishops and the shepherds, whom they found on the Scots border, but the old bishop made answer, and think you, said he, that a shepherd could answer these questions? It has been none else but the devil, for the Scots ministers themselves could not do it—they are but ignorant on such matters—a parcel of beardless boys. Then George thought it was time to take speech in hand. Well, my lord bishop, says George, you call them a parcel of ignorant beardless boys; you have a great long beard yourself, and if grace was measured by beards, you bishops and the goats would have it all, and that will be quite averse to scripture. What, says the bishop, are you a Scot? Yes, says George, I am a Scot. Well, says the bishop, and what is the difference between

a Scot and a sot? Nothing at present, said George, but the breadth of the table; there being a table between the bishop and George. So the bishop went off in a high passion, while the whole multitude were like to split their jaws with laughter.

About this time there was an act of parliament for the benefit of murderers, that any person who committed murder, if they forfeited five hundred marks, which went under the name of "*kin-boot*", because so much of the money went to the murdered person's nearest relations, as the price of blood; the murderer got a remit. Now, George knowing this to be contrary to Moses's law, was grieved very much to see so many pardons sealed with the king's hand for murder, almost one every week, it being usual for the king to subscribe them, that he would not read them, nor enquire what they were; for which cause George writes a right to the crown and sent it to the king to be subscribed, which he actually did, and never looking what it was, returned it to George. No sooner had he received it, but he goes to the king and told him it was not time for him to be sitting there; whereat the king greatly amazed, started up; then George in great haste set himself down in the king's chair, forthwith declaring himself to be king, saying, you who was king must be my fool, for I am now the wisest man. The king was greatly offended at this, until George shewed him the seal and subscription. But from that time the king knew what he subscribed.

The next pardon that came to be sealed by the king, was that of a gentleman who had killed two men before, and had got pardons for them by money. This being the third, the king was very silent in looking over it; George standing by, asked what he was going to seal now? To which he answered, it is a remit for a man who has killed three men at sundry times. I gave him two remits before. O! says George, he has killed but one man. And who killed the other two? says the king. You did, says George, for if you had given him justice when he killed the first, he had killed no more. When the king heard these words he threw down the pen, and declared that such an act to save a murderer should be null ever after by him.

One time George having no money, he goes away, and gets a pick and spade, and then falls a digging at a corner of the king's palace; which the king perceives from his window, calls out what was he wanting there. Are you going to undermine my house and make it fall? No, my sovereign said George, but it is verily reported that there is plenty of money about this house, and where can it be? says George, I cannot find it, for if it is not within the house to do me service, then surely it must be below it. O George, says the king, that is a crave, after the new fashion, what money you want I'll order for you. Then my sovereign says George I'll dig no more.

One time George being in the country, he arrived at an inn where he alighted to refresh himself and his horse. The innkeeper charged

han double for every thing he called for. George never grumbled at this, but gave him all his demands, and away he goes on his journey. At the inn where he quartered the next night, he was used after the same manner, if not worse. Having little farther to go, he returned next day, and came to the same inn where he had been two nights before. So when he alighted the boy asked him what he would give his horse? What you will, says he. The master of the inn came into his room before supper and asked him what he would have for supper? What you will, landlord says he. After supper, and a hearty bowl to put all down, he went to bed. On the morrow he rose very early, and called for the boy to make ready his horse in all haste, for he intended to mount and go directly. Soon after he went into the stable where the boy was, calling for his horse, when he mounted with all the speed he could, and gave the boy a piece of money, saying, Here, my boy, this is for taking care of my horse—I have paid for all I called for in the house—and off he goes.

About mid-day, he alighted again at an inn, to refresh himself and his horse, and there he chanced to be in company with his other landlord, who used him so badly. Sir, says George, I believe I was in your house, two nights ago. Ay, yes, sir, says he, I mind of you pretty well. And where was you last night? Last night, says George, I was in one of the best, and the civilest landlord I ever had in my life, for he brought all things

to me that I stood in need of, without calling for them, and when I came away this morning they charged me nothing, and I paid nothing but sixpence to the boy for dressing my horse blood and wounds, said the old fellow then I'll go there to night. Ay, do, says George, and mind this, when they ask you what you will have for yourself and your horse, answer What you will, sir. George smiled within himself to think how he had got one extortioner to take amends of the other. So this innkeeper set on on his journey, and rode so late that night, that he might reach the cheap inn, that most of the people had gone to bed, before he arrived. As soon as he dismounted from his horse, the boy enquired of him What shall I give to your horse master? To which he answered, What you will, my boy. The boy hearing this ran away up stairs leaving him and his horse standing at the door to his master's room, crying, master, master, What you will has come again. O the rogue, cries he, where is he? I'll cane him. I'll what you will with him by and by. And to him he runs with his cane, licks him and kicks him until he was hardly able to mount his horse again, and would give him no entertainment there, which caused him to ride a whole winter night, after he had got his bones all beat and bruised. So the one parted the other as a murderer, and his defence was, that he was a cheat, and a scorner of his house, until the truth was found out.

After this George being in Cornwall upon business, where he chanced to run short

of money, and not knowing how to make his way to London without it, being acquainted with no one in the country, but knowing his landlord to be loyal to government, and a great favourite of the king his master, he takes a piece of brick, and brays it into small powder, mixed with a little chalk, so that it seem in colour like arsenic, which is poison; then tying it up in two papers, wrote on the one, "Strong poison for the king;" and upon the other, "Slow poison for the queen." Out he goes on purpose, and leaves the parcels on the table, where he knew they would be looking at them; the landlord perceived the directions. So in comes George in great haste, and called out, O landlord! did you see two small parcels I have lost? I know not what to do for it was my main business to take them to London. O you murdering rogue, cries the landlord, I will have you hanged for what you intend. George hearing this made off, but the landlord calling for assistance, he was apprehended, made prisoner of state, and conducted to London by a troop of horse; where the people knowing him told the guard who he was; they hearing this, slipped away shamefully one by one; George thanking them for their good company and safe convoy.

George one day easing himself at the corner of a hedge, was espied by an English squire, who began to mock him, asking him why he did not keckle like the hens? But George, whose wit was always ready, told him he was afraid to keckle, lest he should come and snatch up the egg, which rebuff

made the squire walk off as mute as a fish.

George was met one day by three bishops, who paid him the following compliments:—Says the first, good day, father Abraham; the second, good day, father Isaac; the third, good day father Jacob. To which he replied—I am neither father Abraham, father Isaac, nor father Jacob; but I am Saul the son of Kish, sent out to seek my fathers asses, and lo! I have found three of them. Which convinced the bishops they had mistaken their man.

Their was a bell at Dalkieth, which the Popish clergy made use of to extort confession from the ignorant people, in the following manner:—They told the persons whom they supected guilty, the bell would rive at the touch of a guilty person, but if not guilty it would not. By these means they generally frightened the ignorant into confession; for if the bell would rive the person was then to be condemned to death. But they managed the matter so that the bell was never brought to trial, till George did as follows; He was imprisoned for saying that the Pope was infallable himself, and could not pardon the sins of others. George owned he did so, but referred to the bell whether he was guilty or not. The priests though unwilling, were obliged to comply. George touched the bell, repeating as before, the Pope is fallable, and cannot pardon sin; moreover added, the Pope and the clergy are imposters; and thereupon touched the bell, referring to it for the truth; but the bell not rending, the priests were disgraced as impostors, George was honourably

When near London, George took a knife, and cut a great hole in the backside of the coach, through which he came out; and to make his promise good to the coachman, that he was to give him the other dollar as soon as he saw him come out at the coach-door. The poor coachman drove on till he came to the aforesaid inn, where he alighted and opened the door to let out his passenger, but seeing the coach empty, and a great hole in the backside of it, he cried, I believe I have had the devil in the coach. The people of the inn came flocking about to see what was done; and when the bishop read the lines he concluded that it must have been done by George, so they could make nothing of it.

George went into the mint one day, when they were melting gold. One of them asked George if he would have his hat full of gold, George readily accepted; but it burned the bottom out of his hat, as they knew it would, and for that bout they foiled George. However, George, to be even with them bought a fine large hat, and caused a plate of copper to be put between the lining; and, returning next day, they jestingly asked him if he would have another hat full of gold? He said he would. They gave it him red hot, and George now laughed at them in his turn, telling them, that this new hat was a good one, and stood fire better than the old one. And so he carried it off honestly; and being prosecuted to return it, he excused himself telling the judge he took nothing but what was given to him; so he was honourably acquitted, and the other heartily laughed at.

A Scotchman being reduced to poverty, made his complaint to George, to put him on a method to make money. George told him if he would follow his directions he would try it. There was an old miser, a usurer and money-changer, hard by; George told the fellow to pretend an errand to the miser, and when he came to the table where the heaps of gold lay, to thrust his hand among the gold, but lift none, and run off. This the poor fellow did, and was chased by the miser and his servant, who ran after him into the Street, crying Stop the thief! The poor fellow was stopped, (as George had desired to let them catch him,) George appeared in the mob, and along with him, who was carried before the judge, when he was searched, and nothing being found upon him he was acquitted, and the miser fined in a large sum for accusing him —Afterwards George desiring him to go to the same place, and thrust in both his hands and lift up as much as he could, and run off. This he did, but the miser told him he was not such a fool as to follow him, for he knew he designed to play the fool, to have him fined again. By these means the poor fellow was enriched, and afterwards lived honestly.

Two drunken fellows fell a beating one another on the streets of London, which caused a great crowd of people to throng together to see what it was; a tailor being at work in a garret about three or four stories high, heard a noise in the street, and looking over the window, fell and alighted, upon an old man who was walking on the street; the poor tai-

or was more afraid than hurt, but the man he fell on died directly. His son caused the tailor to be apprehended and tried for the murder of his father. The jury could not bring it in a wilful murder neither could they altogether free the tailor; so the jury gave it out to the judges, and the judges to the king. The king asked George's advice in the matter. Why, says George, I will give you my opinion in a minute; you must cause the tailor to stand on the same spot where the old gentleman was when he was killed by the tailor, and then let the old gentleman's son go up to the same window and jump down, as he did on his father, for I can make no more of it. It was a mercy for the tailor the old gentleman was beneath him, or he had been killed; and it was the old gentleman's lot or misfortune to die there. The tailor's adversary hearing this sentence, would not jump, so the tailor got off.

After this an English squire, who professed to be better versed in poetry than George, laid a wager with another gentleman, five guineas to one, that George would not make the first words that he would say to him in the morning, when newly awakened out of his sleep; so the gentleman went the night before and told George the story, and bade him be on his guard, for in the morning they would certainly come, and that very early. At midnight, if they will, says George, I will order my servant to let them in.

So the English squire sat up all night, conferring with his friends, whether to put in high verse to him, or those simple words

thinking that George would be sitting up at night meditating an answer, so they all agreed that such an simple words he would not be thinking on, and would have no answer provided for such. So away they came in the morning very early with several gentlemen in company to hear the diversion. George's servant opened the door according to his master's order. The squire entered the room first, and awaked George out of his sleep, then said

Rise up, you madman, and put on your clothes

To which George answered—

O, thou hast lost thy wad, man, for I am none of those

The squire confessed he was fairly beat, and would match with him no more. Then another gentleman would hold five guineas that he would give him a word or line he could not meter at the first answer, and to answer it directly as soon as he was done speaking, but George ordered him first to table the money, and then to proceed, which he did and said as follows :—

My belly rumbled and then I f——ed.

George gripping the money answered—

A fool and his money are soon parted.

Then they all cried out he was fairly beaten and what George had said was really true; but he would never lay any more wagers concerning poetry.

George being now far advanced in years, and being weary of the great fatigues and folly of the court fashions, a short time before his death, he had a great desire to visit his native country, and the place of his nativity; therefore he petitioned the king for leave to do so, which was granted. So he set out for Scotland, and went to the parish of Buchanan, in the west, where he visited all his relations and friends. But George staying longer from court than the time allowed, the king sent him several messages to return, to which he returned no answer. At last the king sent him a letter, threatening, that if he did not appear before him in the space of twenty days, he would send his Lyon heralds for him; to which George returned the following answer.

My honour'd liege and sovereign king,
Of your boasting great I dread nothing,
On your loud and favour I'll fairly venture,
On that day I'll be where few kings enter.

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